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Senior Vice-President

NRC 5-year Plan

I am encouraged by the fact that the Executive Committee has noted that the paper "Proposed Guidelines for Preparation of a Five-Year Plan for the National Research Council" neglects a key aspect of NRC's role, namely basic and exploratory research. Nevertheless I am amazed that this omission should have escaped the notice of the members of the TSC and the Management Committee.

The guidelines suggest that the NRC plan be entitled "The National Research Council's Contribution to Canadian Economic Development" and state that it "will document the activities which NRC proposes to carry out in support of the overall federal government strategy for economic development during the 1980's." I have no argument with this aim; it is an important role which NRC must play and it is politically expedient to bring it to the attention of Ministers at this time in as forceful a manner as possible. By itself, however, it does not, in my opinion, constitute a comprehensive plan for the future development of NRC.

Perhaps, as director of a division whose sole purpose in life is to undertake, and be supportive of, basic and exploratory research, I am particularly sensitive. But surely now, as in the past, a case can be made for the support (and growth) of scientific programs within the NRC Laboratories which are not directed toward short-term economic and political goals. Yet, I see no place for them within the framework of the plan as presently outlined. Unless this framework is broadened there would seem to be little point in developing a five-year plan for HIA; it simply will not fit within the NRC plan as I presently perceive it.

Of course, almost everything we do has some impact on industry - our involvement in the CFMT is an excellent example, as are our space science programs (to an increasing degree if the Canadian Space Science Program is approved) and the proposed Very Long Baseline Array. But the point is that that is not our primary motive for doing them. NRC should not be afraid to say, as it has in the past, that it must undertake a certain amount of research with no immediately identifiable economic or industrial benefit. Not to do so could result in NRC becoming an agency solely responsible for the management of projects performed by others. Its role as a creator of innovative ideas, whether in the basic or applied sciences, would very quickly disappear. Unfortunately the damaging effects on Canadian R & D - and this is the difficult point for politicians, with short-term interests, to understand - would not be felt until after the 1980's are over, and then it would be impossible to recover from the loss.

One could not expect the Ministers who make up the Cabinet Committee on Economic Development to include the support of long-term basic and exploratory research in their policies aimed at rapidly bolstering the

economy. A five-year plan for NRC based solely on "Science and Technology Issues" as they are perceived by the government (or the TSC) today will likewise not include plans for increased support of long-term (so-called undirected) research. If this is the intent then it would be best if we were told now.

Original signed by
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